



# Be Prepared!

## Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities

When you are in the middle of a crisis, there is no time to plan a response. Planning in advance is the best protection. For people with disabilities, being aware and prepared is critical during an emergency situation. Perhaps you think that someone else has already considered your needs in an emergency; this belief can create new difficulties and hazards.

This issue of On Target looks at emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. We explore what you can do to prepare for an emergency, how to create a personal support network, what to include in

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an emergency kit and where to go for help in planning for emergencies. You may not be able to avoid emergencies, but with some thoughtful planning you can reduce the risks they pose to your daily routines, and be confident that you are prepared. A good plan can help you feel in control, even in the face of unexpected events.

### What is emergency preparedness?

The term refers to the steps you take to make sure you are safe before, during and after an emergency or natural disaster. These plans are important for your safety in both natural disasters and man-made disasters. Examples of natural disasters are floods, blizzards, tornadoes and earthquakes. Man-made disasters can include explosions, fires, chemical and biological attacks.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, and more recently, Hurricane Katrina, Americans are more aware of emergency events.

According to a 2004 Harris Poll, 96% of Americans feel it is important to prepare for emergencies, but less than 20% describe themselves as totally prepared. Despite guidelines from government organizations and community based services like the American Red Cross, only 42% of Americans have created a personal emergency kit.

People with disabilities may be especially vulnerable during and after emergency events. In an emergency, many systems you rely on may not function as well as they usually do. Familiar landmarks and usual travel routes you and your service animal know may be altered. Utilities like

electricity, water, gas and phone service may be disrupted. You might need to temporarily evacuate to a shelter which may not be fully accessible for your needs. The tips and strategies in this newsletter can help you plan to be prepared for these situations.



### Developing an Emergency Plan

Making a personal emergency plan is the first step. The most important things for you to consider are your surroundings, your physical abilities and the types of emergencies that may occur where you live.

It does not make sense to plan for something that will not happen in your town. For instance, a person who lives in Upstate New York does not need to worry about a tsunami, or tidal wave. But, you may need to prepare for a flood if you live near a river or creek. In addition to learning about the types of emergencies that may affect you, learn what emergency plans are in place in your community. Emergencies can occur when you and your family are away from home, so learn about plans at school and work, too. It is important to find out how you will be notified of an emergency event at school and work. Learn about your community's warning signals and what you should do when you hear or see them.

Ask about registries that may be in place to help people with

disabilities in an emergency. Some communities and counties have a voluntary registry for people with disabilities so help can be provided quickly. Information about registries can often be found on your county or community website home page. Contact your local emergency management office. It should be listed in the government pages of your local phone book. Many offices maintain a registry for people with disabilities. Most electric and utility companies have a voluntary registry for people who depend on oxygen or ventilators so in a power outage, they can alert officials as to who will need help. If you are uneasy participating in a registry, remember the purpose of registries is to get you help as quickly as possible.

Next, make a list of what type of help you will need during an emergency. This means you need to be aware of your physical and mental strengths and weaknesses. You do not need to be a person with a mobility impairment to qualify as someone who may need assistance during an emergency. For example, if you wear hearing aids or rely on lip-reading

to communicate, you most likely do not have trouble understanding your co-workers in your normal office workspace. But, you might have trouble understanding them if you are standing in a smoky, dark stairwell after the power and lights have gone out. Likewise, you may have a visual impairment and a guide dog to assist you in walking around your office building. If your guide dog has participated in all emergency drills, you may not require assistance to evacuate your office in an emergency.

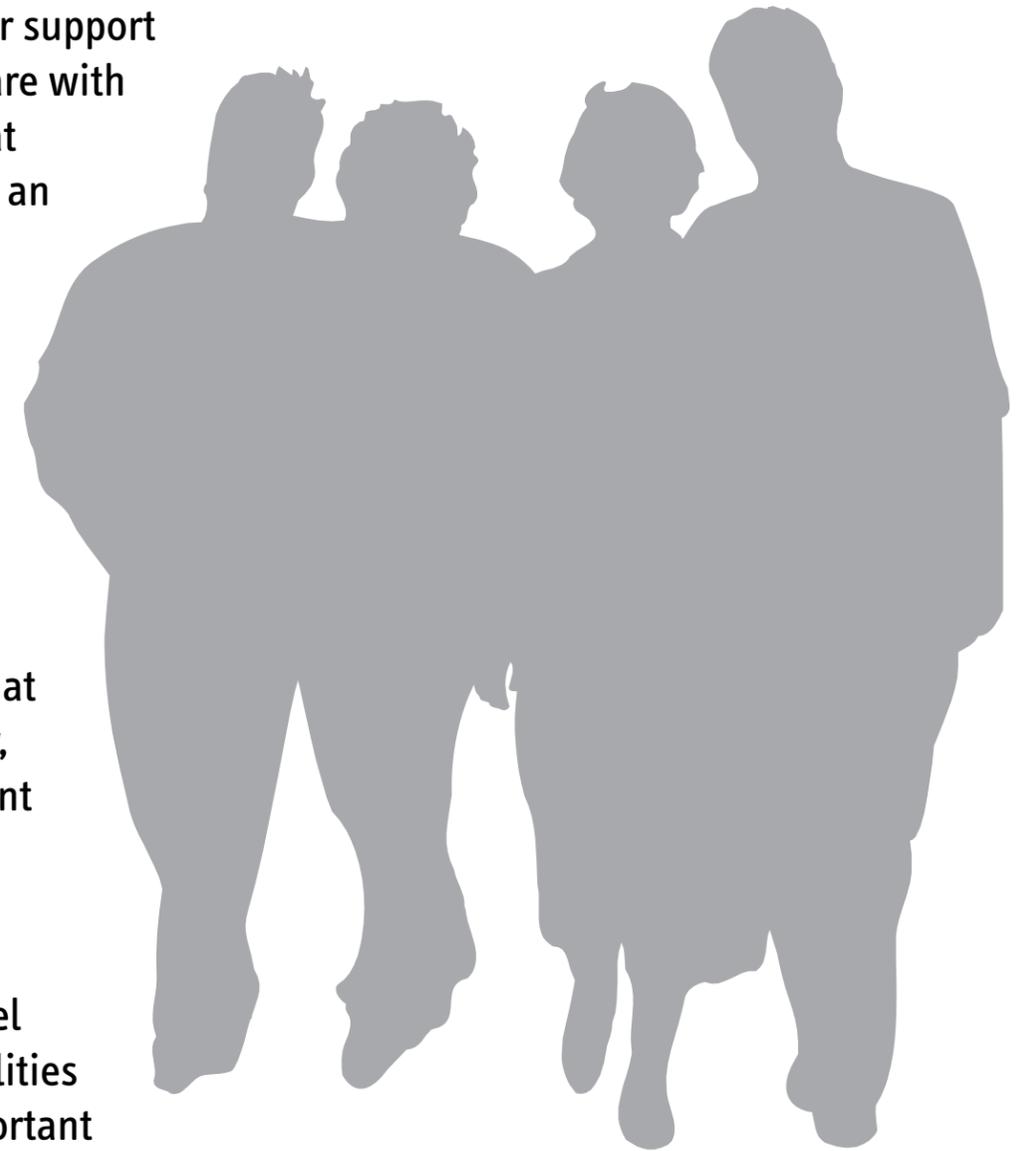
Some people find it easier to list all of their needs by thinking of their daily routines and activities. This includes routines for personal care, daily medications, adaptive devices and any equipment that requires electricity. Include your service animal in your list. Many agencies, such as the American Red Cross and the New York State Emergency Management Office, have created medical information sheets to help you organize this list. An example of such a sheet can be found on page 9 of this newsletter.

When you have made a list of what your needs will be in an emergency, you can then focus on your personal emergency plan. Your emergency plan should be a step-by-step guideline that will help you prepare for and deal with emergency situations. A good plan can help you feel in control. Once you have your plan, share it with family members, friends, neighbors, personal care attendants and co-workers. Post your plan in your house where you can easily reference it.

It is best to start your plan by creating your personal support network. This is your “self-help team,” the people who know about your needs and are willing to help in an emergency. Members of your support network could be roommates, relatives, neighbors, personal care attendants, friends and co-workers. They should be people that you trust and who care about your safety. Do not depend on just one person. The American Red Cross recommends you include at least three people in your network for each location where you normally spend a lot of time.

Once you have your support network in place, share with them your list of what your needs will be in an emergency and your emergency plan. If you use a mobility device, show your support network members how to operate and safely move it. Have them practice using it so that during an emergency, they will feel confident helping you. Practice giving short, specific directions to people. That way, you will feel confident in your abilities to communicate important information in an emergency situation. Even though you have practiced with your network, in a real emergency you may have to rely on strangers or people who have never helped you before.

Ask for members of your network to check with you immediately if local officials give an evacuation order or if a disaster occurs. This is especially important if your



disability prevents you from accessing visual or audio emergency announcements. Agree on how you and your network will communicate during and after an emergency. Your telephone may not be working so have an alternative plan. Give members of your network all the necessary keys they may need to get into your house or vehicle.

## Putting Together Your Emergency Supply Kit

If you search the Internet for information relating to supply kits, you will find a variety of checklists that suggest what to include in an emergency supply kit. The American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency both suggest that you keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days. Store these items in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffle bags or plastic storage boxes. If you need to evacuate, you will want to be able to take your supplies with you.

The New York City Office of Emergency Management suggests each household should assemble a Go Bag – a collection of items you may need in the event of an evacuation. This should be packed in a sturdy, easy-to-carry container. Your Go Bag should be easily accessible if you need to leave your home in a hurry.



The following checklist includes recommended items to include in your supply kit or Go Bag. You may want to add some extra items depending on your specific needs. It takes time and effort to prepare. Gather these items a little at a time, as your energy and budget allow. Think about these items and determine which are most important and relevant to you.

- Three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Three-day supply of water- 1 gallon of water per person, per day
- Portable, battery operated radio or television with extra batteries; hand crank radios are also available
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Kitchen utensils, including a manual can opener
- A whistle (to notify people outside of your location)

- Photocopies of credit cards and personal identification cards
- Cash and coins
- Copies of insurance policies and bank account numbers
- Prescription medications and a list of current doses and schedule
- Eye glasses and/or contact lens solutions
- Hearing aid batteries
- List of style and serial numbers of medical devices such as wheelchair or pacemaker
- A change of clothing and footwear
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Paper, pens and/or pencils
- Sanitation supplies (moist towelettes, toilet paper, waterless hand sanitizer)
- Extra set of house keys and car keys
- Emergency contact list and phone numbers. Make sure to include at least one out-of-state contact, too.

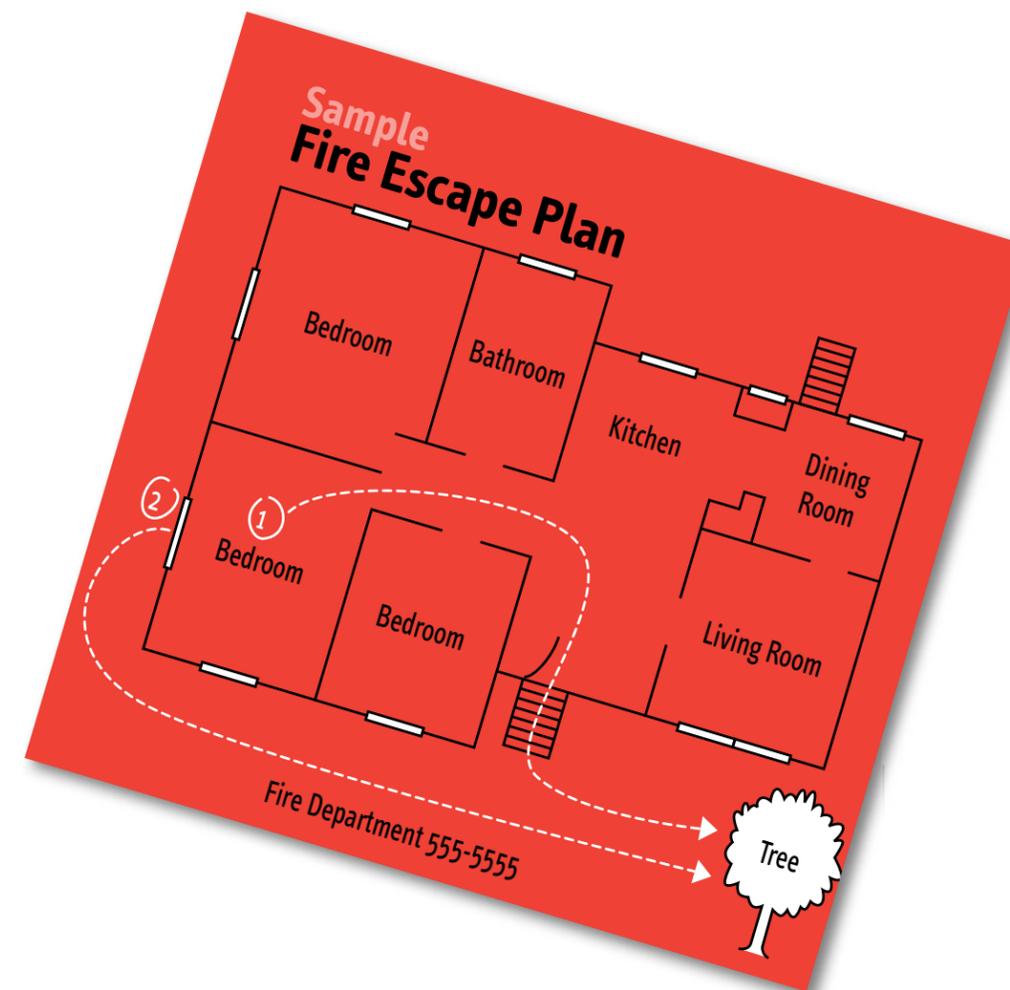
If you have a service animal, make plans to include items for him/her in your kit. Make sure your service animal has identification tags with both your home phone number and that of someone in your support network. You should put a copy of your animal's license and vaccination history in your kit. Other items specific to a service animal include:

- Bowl for food and water
- 3 day supply of food
- Blanket for bedding
- Plastic bags and paper towels for disposing of feces
- Extra harness and/or leash
- A favorite toy
- Medications (if applicable)

Remember that pets, in contrast to service animals, are not allowed in most emergency shelters due to health regulations. Identify some animal shelters or kennels in advance for your pets. Your veterinarian or local chapter of the American Red Cross may be able to provide help with this.

# Tips and Tools

- Install and maintain smoke alarms. Adaptive alarms, such as models with a vibrating pad or flashing light for people with sensory impairments, are available.
- Consider smoke alarms with a strobe light. Some of these alarms can even be mounted outside your house to catch the attention of neighbors.
- Test your smoke alarms every month. You can use a broom handle to reach the alarm if you use a wheelchair.
- Clean your smoke alarm to keep it working. Use a vacuum cleaner hose or a hair dryer to remove dust and dirt that may have settled in your alarm.
- Mount a fire extinguisher in your kitchen, as most house fires start in this room. If you have limited hand dexterity, you can replace the pull pin from the trigger mechanism with a spring device that locks the trigger.
- If you live in a multi-level dwelling, sleep on the first floor if possible. Being on the ground floor will make it easier to get out quickly.
- Know your exits. Practice how you will leave using all available accessible routes.
- Prepare written emergency messages to give to first responders or others who do not know about your disability but are helping you. For example, a message could say, "I am deaf, but I read lips."
- If you are in a smoky room, try getting as close to the floor as possible. If you use a wheelchair, lean over from the chest and shoulders if you are able.
- If you use a wheelchair and your clothing catches on fire, practice the "stop, lock and cover to smother" procedure. Stop, lock your brakes, cover the fire using a small blanket or towel, and sweep your hand over the towel, away from your face to smother.



## Fire Safety Tips

When we think of emergencies, it is easy to think of natural disasters or events outside of the home. However, a house fire is one of the most common home emergencies. It is crucial that everyone know how to get out of their house in case of a fire. But, a fire escape plan is especially important to individuals with disabilities since they may face a greater risk of being injured in a fire.

You can increase your chances of escaping a fire by creating and practicing your fire safety plan until you are comfortable with it, and by using fire warning devices that match your abilities. Also, talk to your family members, caregivers, neighbors and personal support network about your fire safety plan. Practice your plan with them if you will need their help in a fire.



It is important to keep all accessible exits clear and free from obstacles.



Eva Galvin practices evacuating with her dog, Chuckie, from her kitchen exit.

## Independent Living Center Consumers Begin Preparing

The Capital District Center for Independence is an independent living center serving residents of the greater New York State Capital District. Located in Albany, the Center offers assistance to people with various disabilities. Recently, some consumers sat down with the New York State Disability and Health Program staff to discuss their own emergency plans.

Most of the consumers admitted they had not taken the steps to be prepared for emergencies. When asked why, they said that they were too caught up in dealing with every day routines to think about the “what ifs.” But, some people who had made initial steps towards preparation explained what they have done.

Eva Galvin, a homeowner from Niskayuna, NY, who uses a wheelchair, worked with a builder to design her accessible house. She explained that when she was planning her home, she stressed the importance of making every exit wheelchair accessible. Eva admitted that the one thing she forgot to

include is an accessible emergency exit from her bedroom. “I should have thought about designing better emergency exits but who stops to think about what might happen? Thankfully, I have never had a reason to evacuate,” said Eva.

Don White considered emergency evacuations when building his deck. Don, who uses a wheelchair, designed a ramp at the rear of his house that provides an emergency route for two exits; one from his sleeping area and one from his living room in the central part of the house. The ramp leads to a path away from his house. Don told On Target, “It’s important to keep all accessible exits clear, especially in the winter.”

For Tony DiGiovannantonio, living with a seizure disorder has made him realize the importance of thinking ahead. Tony has become a member of MedicAlert, a company that provides information to health care providers in event of emergency. Tony wears a MedicAlert bracelet that has a phone number on it. If Tony is unconscious, an emergency worker can call the 800 number and receive his health information.

## RENAME THE NEWSLETTER!

Do you have a unique way with words? Are you artistically inclined? The New York State Disability and Health Program is looking for you!

The Disability and Health Program has produced the “On Target” newsletter focusing on health and wellness for adults with disabilities for eight years. This newsletter is distributed throughout New York State to adults with disabilities, their families, caregivers, medical care providers and service organizations. Past newsletters have covered a variety of topics, such as nutrition, physical activity and assistive technology for persons with disabilities.

Now we need your help! The “On Target” newsletter is going to be given a makeover, including a new name and a new logo.

This is your chance to exercise your creativity by entering the Disability and Health Program Rename the Newsletter contest.

Suggestions for the newsletter name and/or logo may be submitted via e-mail to [disabila@health.state.ny.us](mailto:disabila@health.state.ny.us); or by mail to:

**NYSDOH Disability and Health  
Program Newsletter Contest  
150 Broadway  
Riverview 3W  
Albany, NY 12204**

Submissions must be received by **November 15, 2007**. So rev up your creative engines, put on your thinking caps, and help us renovate our look. If your idea is selected, you will receive recognition in the next issue when we reveal the new name and logo.

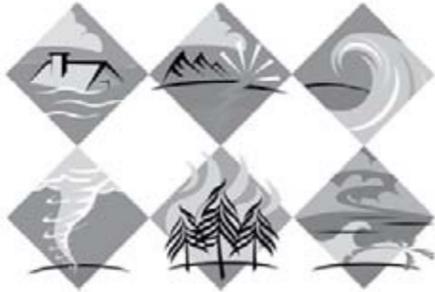
Some towns and counties in New York have voluntary registries for people with disabilities. Maxcine Johnson, who uses a wheelchair due to multiple sclerosis, has registered with the Albany County Office of Community and Emergency Services. Maxcine said that this free service offers her “reassurance should something go wrong.” This registry is updated on a yearly basis so Albany County emergency personnel have recent information in case of an evacuation or emergency.

Bob Williams, an Albany County resident with a depressive disorder, said, “I always thought that people with disabilities were taken care of in emergency situations. But, that

is not the case.” Bob has started planning ahead by getting his car ready for winter. He has extra blankets and gloves in case he is stuck in a snow storm. He also included extra windshield washer fluid. Bob agreed that if he takes preparing one step at a time, it is not so overwhelming.

These individuals have all started the process of preparing for emergencies. They recognize that the steps of preparing are on-going and need to be maintained, particularly for people with disabilities. As Maxcine Johnson stated, “It’s up to me to take responsibility for my own safety. If I don’t care about it, who will?!”

# Community Disaster Preparedness



**Nobody Left Behind**  
Disaster Preparedness for Persons with Mobility Impairments

<i>Disaster Do's and Don'ts Checklist</i>	
✓	Do get involved at work, housing unit & in public disaster planning.
✗	Don't wait until a disaster, and people with disabilities are left behind.
✓	Do get prepared at home and expand preparedness to public settings.
✗	Don't assume evacuation plans exist for persons with disabilities.
✓	Do form an 'Accessibility Committee' at work and other public places.
✗	Don't assume you'll be evacuating with everyone else.
✓	Do explore evacuation options with emergency managers & others.
✗	Don't overlook alternatives, such as evacuation chairs.
✓	Do share the plan with all those in the building and then practice it.
✗	Don't wait until the disaster to raise awareness on disability issues.
✓	Do learn about disasters and disabilities and share that knowledge.
✗	Don't forget to check shelter accessibility & service animal provisions.
✓	Do talk to local emergency managers and Red Cross about ADA.
✗	Don't wait to train and educate others about the plan procedures.
✓	Do initiate talking to emergency managers, responders, and Red Cross.
✗	Don't forget to develop a network of supporters who can assist you.
✓	Do remember getting involved so that "Nobody Is Left Behind".

visit [www.nobodyleftbehind2.org](http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org) for more info

Created by the Research and Training Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas by a grant from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention through the Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine (ATPM). This poster's contents are from persons with mobility limitations who submitted an on-line consumer survey that pertained to their disaster or emergency experiences and do not necessarily reflect the views of the researchers, funders, or the University of Kansas. For more information: 785-864-4005 or 785-864-0708 (TDD) © Research and Training Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas

# Individual Disaster Preparedness



**Nobody Left Behind**  
Disaster Preparedness for Persons with Mobility Impairments

## *Disaster Do's and Don'ts Checklist*

- ✓ Do create an individualized emergency plan.
- ✗ Don't wait until it happens to you.
- ✓ Do assemble a "to go" kit which includes a week's supply of meds.
- ✗ Don't forget to conduct quarterly drills of your personal plan.
- ✓ Do register with or form a registry with emergency responders.
- ✗ Don't leave out those who can assist you in the planning process.
- ✓ Do develop a network of family, friends, and neighbors to assist.
- ✗ Don't forget a flashlight, radio and two routes for exiting your home.
- ✓ Do check out accessibility of local shelters and hotels.
- ✗ Don't put yourself in a dangerous situation when the power goes out.
- ✓ Do have a portable generator or adaptor and car battery for power.
- ✗ Don't think it won't happen to you.
- ✓ Do have adequate rental or home insurance.
- ✗ Don't forget small details, including having extra ready cash.
- ✓ Do get training on and then direct others to turn off gas and water.
- ✗ Don't procrastinate with safety.
- ✓ Do heed early warnings to allow time for evacuation or taking cover.

visit [www.nobodyleftbehind2.org](http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org) for more info

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## Emergency Information List

Please complete this form and distribute copies to your emergency contact people as well as to each member in your network.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Local emergency contact person

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone home: \_\_\_\_\_ work: \_\_\_\_\_

### Network members

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone home: \_\_\_\_\_ work: \_\_\_\_\_

### Out-of-town emergency contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone home: \_\_\_\_\_ work: \_\_\_\_\_

### How best to communicate with me

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Medical Information List

Please complete this form and distribute copies to your emergency contact people as well as to each member in your network.

Primary physician: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of health insurance: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy number: \_\_\_\_\_

Blood type: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies and sensitivities: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medications and dosages being taken: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Specific medical conditions and/or physical limitations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Adaptive equipment and vendors' phone numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Communication difficulties I may have include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cognitive difficulties I may have include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Disability-Related Supplies and Special Equipment List

Check items you use, and describe item type and location. Distribute copies to your emergency contact people as well as to each member in your network.

Type	Location
<input type="checkbox"/> Glasses:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair repair kit:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Motorized:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Manual:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Walker:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Crutches:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Cane(s):	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Dentures:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitors:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Ostomy supplies:	_____

Type	Location
<input type="checkbox"/> Eating utensils:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Grooming utensils:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Dressing devices:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Writing devices:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing devices:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Oxygen:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Flow rate:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Suction equipment:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Dialysis equipment:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary supplies:	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	_____

## Emergency Preparedness Resources

American Red Cross  
[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Center for Disability and  
 Special Needs Preparedness  
 1010 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 340  
 Washington, DC 20007  
 (202) 338-7158  
[www.disabilitypreparedness.org](http://www.disabilitypreparedness.org)

DBTAC - Northeast ADA Center  
 201 ILR Extension Building  
 Cornell University  
 Ithaca, NY 14853-3901  
 1-800-949-4232  
[www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/northeastada/](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/northeastada/)

Federal Emergency Management  
 Agency  
[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

The National Organization on Disability  
 910 Sixteenth Street, NW  
 Washington, DC 20006  
 (202) 293-5960  
[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

New York City Office of Emergency  
 Management – Senior Citizens and  
 People with Disabilities  
[http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/oem/html/readynewyork/info\\_seniors.html](http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/oem/html/readynewyork/info_seniors.html)

New York State Emergency  
 Management Office  
[www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us)

New York State Department of Health  
[www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)

Public Health Emergency  
 Preparedness and Response  
[www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov)

United States Department  
 of Homeland Security  
[www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)  
[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

FEMA’s “A Guide to Citizen  
 Preparedness”  
<http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/>

Center on Disease Control’s Emergency  
 Preparedness for Businesses  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/prepared/>

Kailes, June Isaacson. *Emergency  
 Evacuation Preparedness: Taking  
 Responsibility for Your Safety: A Guide  
 for People with Disabilities and Other  
 Activity Limitations*, 2002. Published  
 and distributed by Center for Disability  
 Issues and the Health Professions,  
 Western University of Health Sciences,  
 309 E. Second Street, Pomona, CA  
 91766-1854,  
 Voice: (909) 469-5380,  
 TTY: (909) 469-5220,  
 Fax: (909) 469-5407,  
 E-mail: [evac@westernu.edu](mailto:evac@westernu.edu),  
[www.cdihp.org](http://www.cdihp.org)

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Disability and Health Program  
Riverview Center  
150 Broadway, 3 West  
Albany, New York 12204



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(518) 474-2018 or [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov)